Positional Debating

Involves refutation and writing cases.

I. What dooes it mean to debate positionally?

Singular focus in everything you do. They know how to select issues and what to go for because every decision is informed by that singular focus.

Positional debaters have a very clear advocacy. They know what their world looks like.

Positional debaters use tactics and strategy, involving arguments on the flow and how they tie together.

Makes specific nuanced arguments and pays attention to detail.

Emphasizes argument interaction. Every argument has implications for other arguments.

Knows how to connect the dots for the judges to inform the decision calculus.

Has strategic vision, a positional focus, and technical execution.

II. How does positional debating differ from the way I debate now?

Debaters write the first argument that comes to mind. Debate camp’s speed fuels this, but during the season, don’t write the first argument that comes to mind.

Debaters have no strategic reasoning for choosing the case.

Debaters go for different voting issues in every 2AR and 2NR. At least 70% of voting issues in the 2NR and 90% in the 2AR are the same every time because the case is strong enough to survive any answers. Going for different voting issues means the case isn’t strategic enough.

The first problem of not running a positional case is that debaters get spread out. The stacked approach is counter-productive because each argument you throw out has vulnerability to get turned by opponents, and you lose the judge’s attention.

The second problem is that debaters don’t extend enough offense in rebuttals. You want multiple pieces of offense so you have multiple ways to win.

The third problem is that debaters aren’t dominant in cross-examination because they don’t have a clear vision of their strategy.

The fourth problem is that debaters use prep time inefficiently while scrambling to write as many arguments as possible. Debaters do not think how the rebuttal will go; they just throw out as many arguments as possible.

III. What is the big point?

Technical proficiency plus sound positions equals a great debater.

Line-by-line and big picture debate are not mutually exclusive. Use technical proficiency to make the most precise arguments possible. Be able to tell a story even while going quickly.

Use macro-level strategy to decide on the most strategic position and micro-level tactics for picking arguments. Don’t stop at just having a thesis, however.

A position is more than a case: it is the underlying logic of every argument you make. Every time to make an argument against your opponent that doesn’t relate to your case is also key to your position.

IV. Positional Casing

Approach the resolution as a thinker before a debater. When you’re conditioned to debate, some of the practices we emphasize cause debaters to turn their heads off. To make sure you’re thinking, don’t ignore the meaning of the resolution. Find contextual definitions for phrases in the resolution. Contextual definitions better equip you with a nuanced understanding of the topic. Understand the conflict scenario: every resolution essentially compares the Affirmative and Negative advocacy. Determine the division of ground and what each competitor must defend. Then, figure out what you don’t have to defend. What must your opponent defend? Identify the truth in both sides of the resolution so that your position can emphasize the truth. Your position, however, should marginalize the truth of the other side. Do a lot of research, starting with cards before you determine the case’s thesis. The best arguments should not come from the first articles you find.

The case selection principle says that you should choose the position that answers the greatest number of your opponent’s arguments or the most challenging arguments.

Now that you must write the case, adopt a forward-looking perspective. What do you want your second rebuttals to sound like? What do you want your opponents to not be able to say in their second rebuttals? Resist bad habits: don’t recycle arguments from topic to topic. You must do topic-specific research to find the most unique and nuanced arguments. Also, find the best arguments, not the ones you’re most comfortable defending.

Crafting the position general tips: Word economy is important in the constructive. Work on efficiency, clarity, and precision. Use the fewest words possible to explain the argument. Link arguments together clearly in your advocacy. Identify the causal justification for your link arguments and position. Use internal signposting helps the judge flow your cases, meaning you can extend more easily in the rebuttals. Four minutes of the speech should set up two minutes of the key issues in the debate. Embed answers to any response your opponent could make. Write a clever framework. You need reasonable but strategic arguments. Blippy spikes are not reasonable because they raise red flags in the heads of your opponents and the judge. Choose a legitimate interpretation that bolsters your position: narrow what you must defend. Expand what your opponent must defend. Don’t take those first two principles to the extreme. Divide ground clearly to link into arguments you want to make and exclude your opponent’s arguments. Write a smart standards analysis: find multiple independent warrants for your standard, but also include reasons to prefer. Consequentialist standards should be very broad. (Only talking about one consequence is contrary to consequentialist thought.) The advantage is that you can talk about broad impacts. Deontological standards must be very narrow and unique. Clearly explain how a standard functions in the position: is it a side-constraint? Set reasonable burdens for both sides. These set up victory conditions for each side. Design a thesis for your position, including as much of the resolution’s rhetoric as possible and the verbiage of your standard. Write smart contention-level arguments. Be precise in the contention link story. Isolate and explain in the 1AC what about repudiation allows for solvency. Have warrants for every step of the link chain. Use deep warrants to justify the likelihood of the main warrant being true. Every card should have at least one internal warrant. Ideally, you want multiple internal warrants. The position should have reasons why the advocacy is better. Defense is only a reason why your advocacy is not worse. Offense in each part of the case should be independent. Make sure that offensive arguments are hard to turn by identifying a very specific causal mechanism. Even if you have multiple outs, they must link into the same major standard. Every step of the case should have multiple functions: they should answer back your opponent’s responses, yet they should also be reasons to vote for you if dropped. End with a strong terminal impact that includes clear weighing analysis.

V. Positional Casing Applies to Refutation

Decide to accept or reject your opponent’s interpretation of the resolution. Box them in if you accept the framework by identifying its implications.

Commit to offense: make at least three unique, well-developed arguments against your opponent’s position. Extending defense alone doesn’t win important rounds.

Explain the function of arguments and concede arguments when appropriate.

Know what you have to win, and ensure that you do.

Focus on your arguments and make sure that the analysis is strong and impacts to the same basic idea.

Use your extensions to answer back their arguments.

VI. Rethink the way you approach the case-writing process. Rethink the way you refute. Being specific and nuanced allows for increased detail in argumentation.

Positional debaters emphasize argument interaction. Good positional debaters connect the dots for the judge.

Strategic vision, positional focus, and technical execution allow positional debaters to excel.